

[*From the Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries, May 25, 1865.*]

J. Y. AKERMAN, Esq., F.S.A., Local Secretary for Berkshire, communicated the following Report of Excavations in an ancient Cemetery at Frilford, near Abingdon, Berks:—

“About eighteen months since, my neighbour Henry Comins, Esq., called upon me and brought for my inspection an iron umbo, and the fragments of a pair of bronze fibulæ, which he stated had been found by labourers quarrying stone in a field about midway between Frilford and Garford.

“Recognizing in these remains the Anglo-Saxon types which excavations have rendered so familiar to the Antiquary, I last autumn obtained permission from William Aldworth, Esq., the owner of the land, to explore the spot, the result of which I have now the honour to lay before the Society.

“Frilford, the Frieleford of the Domesday Survey, is a hamlet of Marcham, a large and populous village three miles west of Abingdon. The editor of the *Chronicon Monasterii de Abingdon*, Preface, page xxxvii., observes that Frea, the goddess of love and beauty, gave her name to Frilford. The earlier form of this word is Frigeleford, which clearly resolves itself into Frige-leahford, “the ford by the field of Frea.”

“A charter of Edgar, A.D. 965, gives to the Abbey of Abingdon, Marcham, with its hamlets Frilford and Appleton. The cartulary states that ‘Frileford, Appeltun, Leoie, fuerunt tempore Edgari Regis membra de Marcham.’

“The spot where these remains were discovered was formerly known as ‘Frilford Heath,’ and has only been brought under the plough within the last twenty years. It is bounded on the south by the small stream of the Ock, a tributary of the Thames, which it reaches at Abingdon. The Ock as a boundary is often mentioned in Anglo-Saxon charters.

“The quarry alluded to has been open for some time past; the work has proceeded in a northerly direction, parallel with the road from Frilford to Garford. During its progress the workmen have met with several graves, some of which contained relics;

but, according to their account, the greater part skeletons only. I have seen some spear-heads and the fragments of a bucket, which were recovered from a dirt heap, having been disregarded by the finders and mercilessly demolished by the spade and pickaxe. I have also seen an urn of dark-coloured pottery of Roman, or Romano-British fabric, and a bronze pin, which the workmen state were found by them at the bottom of what they term a well. Both these objects have been drawn the actual size by my friend the Rev. J. C. Clutterbuck.

“ I commenced operations by opening a trench from south to north, when we soon came upon a grave containing a skeleton lying with the head to the west, without any relic whatever. Two more graves were found in the same direction with the same results. A fourth grave contained the skeleton of a woman with a few relics of minor importance, with the exception of an oval-shaped brooch which had once been set with a paste, and still shows traces of gilding. This object differs in style and workmanship from the Saxon fibulæ, and resembles a brooch found at Long Wittenham (*Archæologia*, Vol. xxxix. pl. xi. fig. 1).

“ Another grave contained a female skeleton with a pair of saucer-shaped fibulæ gilt on the inside and ornamented in a similar style to those engraved in *Pagan Saxondom*, pl. xix. There was also a bronze girdle buckle.

“ In cutting a second trench, parallel with the first, three or four graves were discovered with skeletons only. In another the trench intersected the grave in the centre, and the workman's pick was driven through an umbo which lay in the lap of a male skeleton. The pick has passed through it without breaking it into pieces. I call attention to this fact as showing the excellence of smiths' work among the Anglo-Saxons, and as proving that their boasted skill in the fabrication of warlike implements was not purely mythical.

“ Several small-brass coins of the Lower Empire were found as the excavations proceeded, and this, together with the circumstance that the ground is strewn with fragments of Roman or Romano-British pottery, must be viewed in connection with the discoveries I have now to describe.

“ In a grave the skeleton in which lay, like all the rest, with the head to the west, was found a small coin of Constantine. A thin stone was placed on the forehead, and upon this lay the coin. I dare not venture to say that this piece of money must be considered as the classical pagan viaticum, but from what follows it will be seen that there is some probability of its being so.

“ Only one fictile vessel was met with, viz. a small urn of black pottery and of Saxon type, but without ornamentation, and

differing from others which have come under my notice. It was found by the left shoulder of a perfect skeleton without any other relic, and doubtless had held holy water.

" In digging another trench parallel with the former we came upon a grave which had been nearly entirely filled in with large stones, of which there was almost a cartload. On clearing them out a leaden coffin was laid bare. It was pressed almost flat by the superincumbent load which had been laid upon it. On removing the lid, which separated easily, the remains of a human skeleton were disclosed, the skull, arms, legs, and feet tolerably perfect, though flattened by the weight of the great vertical pressure. Mr. Clutterbuck, who was present, kindly undertook the task of exploring the contents of the coffin, and carefully removed with his hands the black mould among which the skeleton lay. Nothing however was discovered until the breast was reached, upon which lay a small brass coin, which I at once suspected had been placed in the mouth of the corpse. The coin bears the diademed head of Constantine the Great, a portion of the legend only being legible, D. N. CONST. The type and legend of the reverse are obliterated by corrosion. The position was confirmed by examining the jaw, which was marked by a spot of *æruugo*, in precisely the same manner as that found in the parish of Long Wittenham (Proceedings 2nd s. ii. p. 38). The most minute examination failed to discover any inscription or ornamentation on the coffin, which was of the plainest form of those in use at the present day. A few paces further northwards a second grave was discovered and its contents explored. It resembled the former in every respect, with the exception of the coin, and was filled in with large stones. Professor Rolleston has favoured me with his remarks on these remains, which I beg leave to append to this notice.

" Here my researches ended, the owner of the soil objecting to my proceeding further. I much regret that failing health prevented my noticing in more minute detail the particulars of each grave (amounting in number to thirty-eight), and that I could at intervals only superintend these excavations.

" That the greater part of these graves held the remains of converted or half-converted Anglo-Saxons will scarcely be denied, but with regard to the tenants of the two leaden coffins, the coin found in one of them seems to point to a different conclusion. I am inclined to believe that they are in reality Roman or Romano-British, unless we are to conclude that the practice observed by the Romans of placing a piece of money in the mouth of the defunct, a practice which must have been very common throughout Britain after the reign of Constantine, was sometimes observed by our Saxon ancestors.

" From the facts here stated it seems highly probable that a

Romanized population occupied this tract of country before the arrival of the Saxons. The two exceptional interments lead us to this inference. The number of graves in which neither weapons nor personal ornaments were discovered is somewhat remarkable, and may be compared to the graves found at Arne Hill, near Lockinge, Berks. (Proceedings, 2nd s. ii. 320), for, though in that case the labourers doubtless overlooked some objects, the greater part were evidently without relics. Christianity in fact seems to have warred successfully against the practices of heathenism, and the heath and the hill-top would appear to have been eventually abandoned for the consecrated precincts of the churches, to the extinction of the grosser superstitious practices of our Saxon forefathers, although some of them are denounced by the canons enacted under King Edgar."

The following remarks by Professor Rolleston were appended to Mr. Akerman's communication :—

FRILFORD CRANIA.

The fragments of lower jaw and of calvarium from the two leaden coffins indicate the possession by their owners of much greater muscular strength and of much greater size than that which the other male relics lead us to think their owners possessed.

CRANIUM (MALE) MARKED A.

The male skull, marked A, which was found with a portion of a fibula but two feet above it, is very nearly perfect, the exterior being merely a little burrowed into superficially by roots, and the lower ends of the nasals having been broken away. It is a moderate sized skull, of the brachycephalic type, and belonged probably to a man about the middle period of life. The extreme length of the skull, as given with other measurements, is likely to deceive, as the squama occipitis superior is of great thickness, and occupies a well nigh vertical plane some considerable way posteriorly to the posterior edge of the parietals, which drop away rapidly from the roof of the skull towards their junction with the occipital. The length from the glabella to the occipital spine being $6\frac{7}{8}$, the length from the glabella to the apex of the occipital is $6\frac{3}{8}$. The roof of the skull slopes away gently from the middle line, the zygomatic breadth is not great, and the temporal ridges are not very prominent. The supraciliary eminences are moderately and the underlying sinuses largely developed; the orbital edges of the frontals are convex; the nasals appear to have been prominent, and probably rose into a bold curve at their lower ends, which are broken away. The teeth are of moderate size; the posterior molars above must have been lost early, if developed at all; there is only one on each side below, that on the right side being probably molar No. 3, that on the left molar No. 2. The teeth are much worn, especially on the right side, where the left molar No. 1 above must have been lost long before death. The lower jaw is slight as compared with the fragments of jaws from the leaden coffins, but its symphysis and angle can touch the same flat plane as they lie upon it, and the chin is fairly prominent. The ramus forms an oblique angle with the body of the bone. A line joining the centres of the two auditory foramina passes in front of the occipital foramen.

The measurements of this skull are as follows:—

Length, glabella to occipital squama	6'' $\frac{7}{8}$
„ to apex of squama	6'' $\frac{3}{8}$
Greatest breadth at post inferior angle of parietals	5'' $\frac{2}{8}$
Breadth from one parietal tuberosity to the other	5''
Circumference, greatest	19'' $\frac{5}{8}$
Zygomatie breadth	4'' $\frac{3}{4}$
Orbital breadth	4''
Greatest frontal breadth	4'' $\frac{1}{2}$
Frontal length	4'' $\frac{1}{2}$
Parietal length	4'' $\frac{7}{8}$
Occipital length	4'' $\frac{5}{8}$
Frontal radius	4'' $\frac{6}{10}$
Nasal radius	3'' $\frac{1}{10}$
Vertical radius of parietal	4'' $\frac{6}{10}$
Occipital radius	4'' $\frac{2}{10}$
Maxillary radius	4''
Greatest height from occipital foramen to vertex	4'' $\frac{9}{10}$

CRANIUM (FEMALE) MARKED B.

The female skull marked B was found with a small Roman coin just beside its jaw, and had a green copper staining on the right side of the palate and of the lower jaw. It is a larger skull, as the annexed measurements shew, in most dimensions than skull A; but it belonged to an individual of about the same age, though of the opposite sex, most probably, inasmuch as the muscular ridges are smaller, as also the teeth, the cerebellar fossæ more tumid, the facial and palatal bones slighter, and the orbital edges of the frontals sharper than in that skull. The interparietal diameter is large, as it is often in female skulls. The nasals lead one to suppose that their possessor had a Roman nose, as they slope gently forwards from their junction with the glabella, and expand and rise considerably at their lower ends.

The two anterior molars below on both sides appear to have been lost during life, those on the right side a considerable time before death, and with a good deal of irregular bony deposit about their sites; the sockets of those on the left side are still partly unfilled up or unabsorbed, the remaining molar on this side is attacked by caries. The two posterior upper left molars were likewise lost during the lifetime of the possessor; the three on the right side are in place, and diminish much in size from the first to the third.

The mastoids are remarkably small in this skull; the spines of the sphenoid remarkably large, and there are several adventitious bony deposits upon the skull, the bony structure of which is of considerable density.

The measurements are as follows:—

Length	7'' $\frac{2}{8}$
Breadth (greatest is at parietal tuberosities)	5'' $\frac{2}{8}$
Circumference	20'' $\frac{1}{2}$
Zygomatie breadth	4'' $\frac{3}{4}$
Orbital breadth	4''
Greatest frontal breadth	4'' $\frac{3}{10}$
Frontal length	5'' $\frac{2}{8}$
Parietal length	5''
Occipital length	5'' $\frac{1}{8}$
Frontal radius	4'' $\frac{7}{10}$
Parietal and vertical radius	4'' $\frac{6}{10}$
Occipital radius	4'' $\frac{1}{10}$

Nasal radius	$3\frac{9}{10}$ "
Maxillary radius	4"
Greatest height from occipital foramen to vertex	$5\frac{1}{10}$ "

CALVARIUM MARKED E.

Given to me by J. Y. Akerman, Esq. Nov. 7, 1864.

The frontals and parietals are nearly perfect, and the larger part of the occipital is still left in connexion with them. The rest of the bones of the skull are lost.

This calvarium is asymmetrically developed, the right side being somewhat anterior to the left, as if it had been pushed forwards; the left occipital fossa for the posterior lobes of the cerebrum is considerably larger than the right, whilst the right frontal seems to have been more capacious than the left, in which, however, the frontal sinus is larger than the one on the right, where again the supraorbital notch is converted into a foramen, which it is not on the left side. The glabella is prominent.

The pits for the Paeehionian bodies are large, and the sutures are obliterated on the interior surface of the skull, but they are still visible on the exterior of the brain case, even the frontal sutures being so throughout the entire length of the bone.

Length of frontal = 5" Entire length = 7"

Length of parietal = $5\frac{1}{2}$ " Parietal breadth = $5\frac{3}{8}$ "

The skull of which this calvarium is a part must have been capacious, and, from the muscular impressions left upon it and from other circumstances, probably belonged to a powerful man about the middle period of life. The cause of the asymmetrical development seems not to have been any defect of cerebral growth; but probably to have been due to some synostosis, possibly of the left ala of the sphenoid with the frontal or parietal or both of that side.

FRAGMENTS FROM FRILFORD, OCTOBER 1864.

I.

A lower jaw from a leaden coffin. Much more robust than those of skull A or from skull B. The teeth much larger, resembling them however in being much worn and decayed.

II.

Fragments of a second lower jaw with same characters as the preceding, and a stain of verdigris on exterior of right molar alveolar ridge.

III.

Calvarium from a second leaden coffin, less greater part of right parietal and of frontals and the right temporal. Capacious, thick, probably of a man in middle period of life, possibly of the same man as the preceding fragments of jaw.

